THE SNOBS

By George Bronson Howard

CHAPTER I

IT HAD TAKEN me something like half an hour to tell the youth who sat before me hugging his knees and staring out of the window just how it was that he had fallen into one of the seats of the mighty. When I had concluded, I looked at him carefully, and I suppose the innate snobbery in me, and the consciousness of being what he was not, led to the wholly unnecessary remark which I made later.

"And so you are Lord William Conniers and the earl of Orth. Within a month, maybe less, you will be duke of Walshire, and the greatest man in England, next to the royal family."

He turned on me suddenly, and I saw that I had underrated my man. Something blazed in his eyes which told me that there was a Conniers there, after all.

"It's funny, isn't it?" he cried. I knew he had seen my mockery and contempt and that he resented it far more than I believed him capable of doing. "Oh, yes; it's funny, it's infernally funny. You sit there and tell me all this—tell me how great I'm going to be, and all that. And as you tell it you say to yourself: 'If it was only me that was gettin' what this little cheap skate is gettin'!' That's right, ain't it? And you sit there and grin, and know you're better'n me all the time you're pretending respect."

He paused for a moment and crossed one leg over the other, staring at me fixedly and with animosity. Outside barefooted, dirty children played noisily; and a slattern woman passed down the street carrying a pitcher full of beer. Two girls on the steps next door were talking to two cheaply dressed youths, one of whom wore a rhinestone pin stuck in a bow tie. The words "My gentleman friend" and "Molly, she's a lady that works in a factory out to Woodberry," and "Say, ain't that fierce?" floated into the room at detached intervals. The youth sitting opposite me heard them, and scowled.

"It's all very well for you," he continued, speaking less angrily, but with much intensity—"it's all very well for you to look at me and wonder how I can be so common, and yet be falling into all this. You ain't never had to stand for what I've had to. I know who your people are—yes, I read the society column in the newspapers. I see your name lots of times—riding fox chases, and being at balls and cotillons, and bein' a risin' young lawyer of good family. I know all about you, Mr. Stuart. You was sent to college, and you've always had a nice home and lived with nice people, and bin taught to talk right, and do things like a gentleman. I ain't. I never knew nothing about my father. Ma knew he was an Englishman, but she didn't know nothing else. Ma kept me to school till I was 12, and then she died. Then Uncle Hen put me to work with him on his truck wagon. Ever since then I've bin walking the streets of Baltimore shouting: 'Strawberries!' 'Annierunnel tomatoes!' and anything else that he sells. And in the winter I drove a milk wagon. And I've bin doing that for nine years. Look at my hands." He stretched them forward—rough, red, knobby paws. "And then look at yours. Well, what'cher expect from me? I didn't ask anybody to die and make me an earl, or a dook, or anything. It ain't my fault if my father never let on. So don't you come acting as though I was trying to butt in somewhere I don't belong. See?"

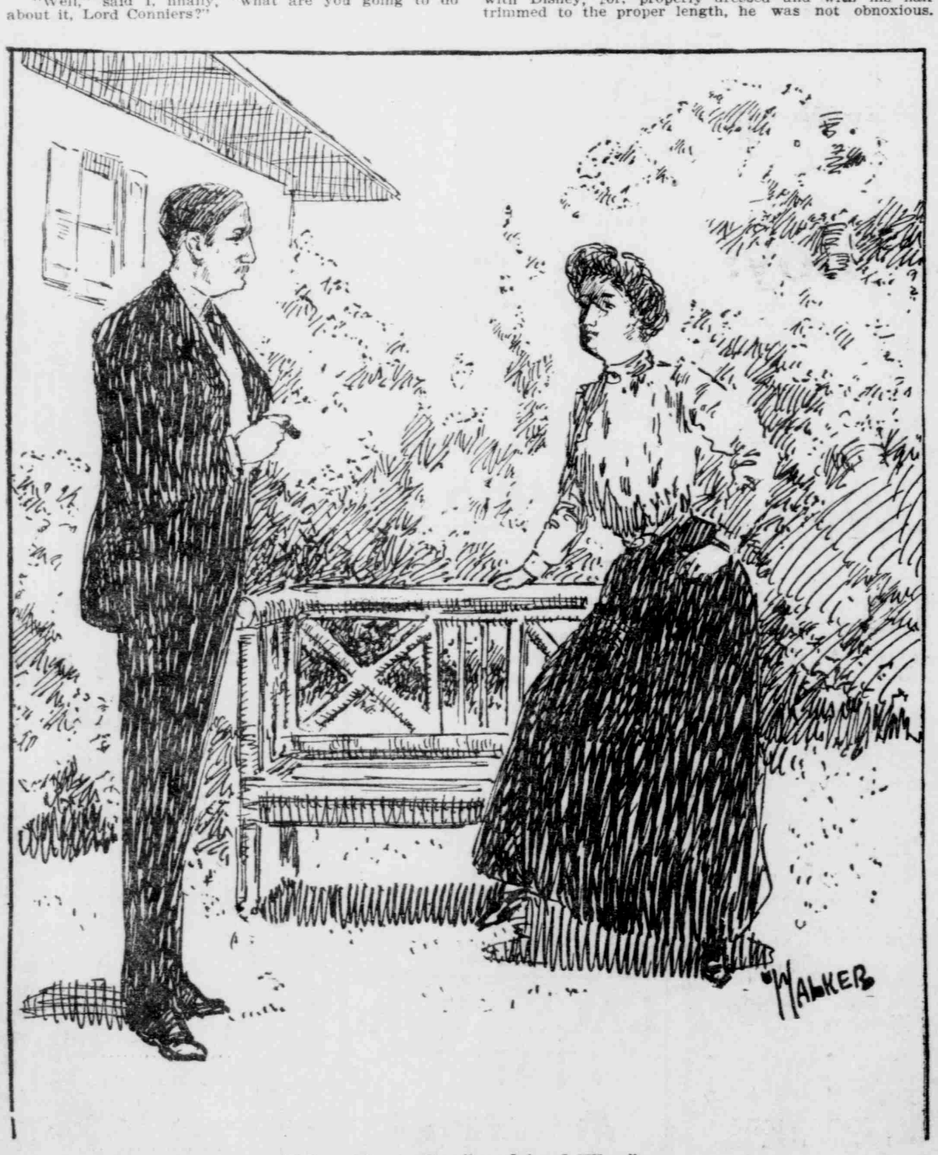
He paused again and filled a short, black pipe. I lighted a cigarette, and surveyed the earl of Orth and the future duke of Walshire.

He was rather short and very chunky, having enormous shoulders, but a very thin, scraggy neck. His nose was blunt at the tip, and his nostrils distended; and his mouth was as much too large as his lips were much too thick. His eyes were good—clear and honest eyes they were, and without fear; and had not his thick brown hair been parted in the middle in such a way that it fell over his brows, his forehead would have been good, likewise.

Taking him in the whole, attired as he was in a striped suit of very poor material, cut badly, but with an attempt at cheap style, he would not have been remarkable among a crowd of his fellow milk-wagon drivers, car conductors and others of the same lik.

He wore a horseshoe of glass diamonds in his scarf and a cheap white pique vest; and his patent leather shoes were cracked in several places. Altogether, he was the typical cheap bounder, dressed in his best clothes. The one good thing about him was a certain dominating force, a certain strength of character, which he conveyed without effort.

"Well," said I, finally, "what are you going to do about it, Lord Conniers?"



"'Have him to dine!' exclaimed Ellen."

He whirled on me sharply. "Don't call me that. Plain Henry Disney's good enough for me for a while. Call me Disney, and forget the earl and the dook part of it."

I threw away my cigarette. "You are the earl of Orth," I stated, calmly. "Your grandfather, the duke, is on his deathbed. I've been commissioned to find you. I've found you; and I'm going to wire Walshire's solicitors in London that I have. What are you going to do—keep on driving the milk wagon?"

The flash came again. "See here, Beau," he warned, "you're laughing at me again, and I don't like it. No, I ain't going to keep on driving a milk wagon. But if you've got any fool idea in your head that I'm going to England and make a holy show of myself before all them dooks and people, you got another think coming. I ain't by a lot. You can't make no dook out of me just by telling me I am going to be one. No, sir, that takes time and careful coaching." He seemed to take a fresh start here.

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do," he said. "I'm going to get you to teach me what I don't know. I'm quick enough to learn, and I've read a lot, and I ain't going to drink out of no finger bowls or make any such breaks as that. But I don't talk right, and I don't dress right, and I don't eat right, and I don't do a lot of things right that I ought to do. You know all of these things, so I'll put myself in your hands, and let you see what you can do. See? Then when I get a sort of crust on, I'll hit the pike for England, and try to do my best." He shook his head solemnly. "But it ain't no cinch what I'm tackling, it sure ain't."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

He proceeded to tell me. His brain was wonderfully active, and he had already mapped out a campaign. In the first place, no one was to know who he was. "Course, if they knew I was the earl, they'd treat me O. K. jest because I was, and I wouldn't stand no show finding when I did right and when I did wrong. I ain't stuck on myself, Beau; I know I ain't what you are. Got some ideas from reading the papers and the magazines."

It appeared further that I was to draw on the London people for money for his clothes and anything he needed; and to coach him for several weeks on the little things of polite life. Then he intended to take one of the cottages on the Commosie Hotel grounds, in the Blue Spring valley. The valley is the residence of the outdoor set of Baltimore people; the Hunt Club—"The Kennels"—is there, and it is near enough to the city to be reached in half an hour's time.

He had read all about this in the papers, and knew that these were the people who could teach him what he needed to know. So he had it mapped out that I was to make him acquainted with some of these people and give him a start. "I ain't asking for more," he said.

An hour later I left the house with an increased respect for Disney, and wandered toward the cars, passing the cheap saloons, gangs of corner loafers, women in wrappers, sitting on front stoops, and children sleeping on cellar doors. The street smelled abominably, and the people were in accord with it. And it was here that the future Walshire had lived his life.

Altogether he had turned out much better than I expected when I had found that he lived in that particular part of southwest Baltimore and was the driver of a milk wagon. He knew that he was off wrong and was willing to remedy his defects. He had strength of character and could do things if he wished; and while he respected what he did not have, he lacked the cringing servility which generally goes with that particular sort of respect. So I was hopeful.

Do not think that I embarked on the campaign of making a gentleman from a bounder without some eye to prospective benefits to me. I intended to become the manager of the Walshire estates, the second largest in England; and I knew that Disney would give me the position if I helped him as he wished to be helped.

How it came about that this man was the representative of one of the oldest families in England is easily told. His father, the third son, had gone wrong years before, had come to America, married a shopgirl and been lost sight of. Meanwhile his eldest brother was thrown from a horse and his neck broken, while the second son was killed in Afghanistan while leading his company against Afridis. The first son had married and left two children, both boys. One died of pneumonia several years after his father's death. Then came a stretch of ten years, and the second grandson grew to manhood, only to be drowned while yachting, a year before the search for Henry Disney's father began.

How I got the commission to hunt for the missing third son is not important. I did get it, and I found not the third son, but his offspring by the shopgirl he married, Henry Disney.

CHAPTER II

Of the next few weeks I shall have very little to say. I took Disney to live with me in my apartments, and taught him some of the things which he wanted to know—such as, for instance, that it is not good form to tuck a serviette in the collar at meals, and that dishes should not be piled one on the other. I pointed out to him that it was preferable not to say "them" things, and that a toothpick should be deferred until after meals. I endeavored to show him that baths in the morning were good things, and that there was no virtue in wearing the hair long and in plastering it with grease. A list of these actions "to be avoided" carries no interest to the general reader, and elimination is desirable.

My tailor took his measure for all sorts of clothes, and my haberdasher sent up his choicest samples in shirts, hosiery and neckwear.

So, after two weeks, I was not ashamed to be seen with Disney, for, properly dressed and with his hair trimmed to the proper length, he was not obnoxious. It is true that he was not good-looking, not did he have the air of breeding which should have gone with his clothes, but he might have passed anywhere for a man of the better classes.

Quickness of mentality was certainly his, judged by the celerity with which he accomplished changes in his speech and his intonation. When Disney learned a thing, he learned it well; and when he acquired a social grace, he carried himself through it with an air of being at ease. There was no timidity, no "afraid of not doing it right," with Henry Disney.

The cottage of the hotel grounds having been rented, two weeks later saw me installed there with my protege. I had grown to like the man during this time; and he, while in no respect assuming the attitude of an inferior, looked to me for what he should know, and, to a certain extent, leaned upon me. The hardest time of all had come now. I was to introduce Disney among my acquaintances.

Being a Stuart and having ancestors in plenty who had lived in this valley, I knew every one there worth knowing, and was able to introduce Disney among them. There was a rub, however, which irked me. I did not especially care for these people; they were nice enough, they had entrance to the Monday cotillons, and the men belonged to the decent clubs in town. They breathed of good breeding and family history. The men were the heads of banking houses and big commercial houses, or else had independent fortunes. They gathered at the Kennels and talked steeplechases, points of foxhounds and hunters, tennis tournaments and golf scores. They played poker and pool, smoked cigars, and discussed people they knew. There was very little distinction made between the man of 50 and the boy of 20; they were all boys, learning little wisdom after their teens, always keen for a drinking bout, a pretty girl or a big game of chance. The lot of them were happy, healthy, hearty children, who never lost the spice of doing wrong. They were all the same. Not one of them had any broader scope than Baltimore and its vicinity; not one of them had any ambition to be any more than he was born. They did not see how that could be, for the general sentiment of the lot of them is voiced in Pearce Croxall's sententious remark when Perry Cathcart was elected mayor: "It's a pity for a gentleman to be mixed up in that dirty political game."

Afterward Perry became senator, and later ambassador to a big foreign country, but he never stood as well in the crowd's estimation as before he entered politics.

The girls—the women folk rather—were charming, but not especially amusing. Not that the latter was their fault; the poor girls were too much held down by convention, that is all. Their chief topics of conversation were dinners to be given, receptions to be attended, the horse show, and who were "coming out" next season and what their people were going to give for them.

The whole lot—women and men alike, but especially women—were snobs. They did not know that they were snobs. No one had ever told them so. They simply liked to associate with the people they knew. It was too much trouble to find out what other people were; and, besides, outsiders did not know their ways, and would be very hard to get along with.

And it was into this crowd that I must try to pitchfork Disney. I knew it would be a failure from the start, and I told Disney so.

"Don't you think I know that?" he said. "I'm not going to try to butt in. I'm out here to watch these people and learn how they do. I've paid my price for an orchestra seat, and all I ask is that the show's worth it. See?"

A great many of the people I speak of lived in the little cottages on the hotel grounds, and took their meals at the hotel, just as we did. The greater number had their own houses in the valley and came up to the hotel to see their friends, many of whom lived there also. The Commosie did not encourage the patronage of the general public. It catered only to this particular crowd.

But where you find society people you will always find other people who want to be one of them. There were a number of such at the hotel—people who had made fortunes in the past few years and wanted expert counsel on the right way to spend it. These were the same people who sent their children to the schools patronized by "our set," if they could get them in. The sole object of the mothers seemed to be to break the way for their daughter's social success. Their methods might have succeeded anywhere but in Baltimore. "Our set" knew quite enough people and did not want to know any more. The men occasionally took up the newcomers, if they happened to have made it known that the daughters were to have handsome dowries; but the women folk let them severely alone.

Such a newcomer was Mrs. Parkin, whose husband had grown wealthy in the produce business, in which he started by selling vegetables in the market. Of Mrs. Parkin I shall have more to say later; of her daughter, much more.

I began the campaign with Disney as an objective by tackling my cousin, Ellen Rigny. Disney had sworn me to secrecy about his title and prospects, and I give you my word I was afraid to disobey him. Taking Ellen aside and giving her a hint was not betrayal, so this I did.

"He comes of an excellent family in—er—the middle West, Ellen," I told her. I would have liked Ellen to marry Disney; the family was beastly poor. "And while he isn't rich, he has a very comfortable income."

Ellen looked at me with wide open eyes. "Well, Douglas, I dare say he is nice enough in a business way." Ellen thought that I had some law case for Disney.

"Oh, forget the business end of it, Nell," I said. "Disney's here for a month or so, and I want him to have a good time. I want him to meet our crowd—and, frankly, I want you to take him in. Invite him to dine at your place some night and have some of the girls and fellows over——"

"Have him to dine!" exclaimed Ellen. She looked at me in rather a surprised way. "Why, I didn't know he was our sort; is he?"

That was a very embarrassing question to ask. It meant something to be invited to the Rignys', however, even though they were as poor as the proverbial field mouse. So I lied nobly.

"Our sort!" I replied, in just as wondering a tone as Ellen used. Then I looked pained. "Ellen," I challenged, "do you imagine that I would ask you to invite a mucker to your house to meet people?"

Ellen looked at me doubtfully. "I don't believe you would, knowingly, Douglas," she replied. "But, you see, you have very queer ideas—and—" She puckered up her lips, then said in a resigned tone: "If you really wish it very much, I'll have him over some day to lunch. And I'll have Mary Crossley and Helen Calvert and Elsie Leighton—and some of the boys. But—"

She left the sentence unfinished. I flushed.

"Of course," I said, "if you don't want to do it—"

"I dare say he's very nice, if you say so," Ellen hastened to say. Considering that I got Ellen's brother appointed to the Naval Academy, through personal intimacy with a congressman, the family owed me something, and I felt justified in taking my due.

"Really, Nell," I said, "I think you carry your exclusiveness a little too far. What good does it do? Take that poor little Parkin girl, for instance. She's pretty and sweet and just out of convent school. And yet none of you will have anything to do with her—"

"Her father had a stall in Lexington Market," stated Ellen, calmly.

"I know. He's a bounder, no doubt. Nobody's asking you to associate with him nor with Mrs. Parkin. But what's the matter with little Alice?"

Ellen stared at me. "I never knew a man with such queer ideas as you have, Douglas," reproved Ellen, gently. I threw up my hands and retired in disorder.

Ellen did invite Disney to lunch, and he met the right sort of people there. He proved to be a genuine surprise to me. His intonation was good, and he made no remarkable mistakes of grammar. He had been seated next to Helen Calvert, whose silly little head was full of ancestral nonsense, and who took a dislike to him because he made some noise in eating his soup. Disney strove nobly, but met a cold wall of reserve on every side. Ellen tried to unbend, but only became condescending. The lunch was not a success.

I noticed that the luncheon crowd avoided me after that; but I stuck to my task with a will and introduced Disney religiously to everybody I met. Disney followed up each introduction with painstaking effort, and after several days of cold politeness the people began to snub him.

One can't blame them. Disney was most certainly not their sort. He was not especially entertaining, and his looks were not such as to draw any favorable attention.

One day he came to me, and, after smoking silently for several minutes, burst into some very choice expletives. Then he said: "You take it from me, Beau"—he fell back into his old lines occasionally—"you take it from me that this bunch don't want to mix in with yours truly; and I'm not caring a continental whether they do or not. I'm learning, and I'm learning lots, but I've got out of the way of respecting myself. If I cared for these people there might be some excuse for me taking their knocks——" He cut himself short. "But say, there's one of them—she's all right. What's the matter, Stuart is she a top-notcher? I don't get a knock-down to her, it seems."

I found that he referred to Miss Parkin.

"She's to the good," he cried, enthusiastically. "She for me, if she will have me. She can play in my ancestral castles if she takes a notion. Catch on to her eyes, will you? Ain't they got real sunshine in them? And her hair! Real gold, that; none of your varnish. And sweet and pretty, and all that. She's got me going, Beau, but I can't come within a yard of meeting her. Stays all by herself when she ain't with that fat woman who pilots her around. Top-notcher?"

"She's Miss Parkin," I told him. "Seventeen years old, convent school girl, very nice, but no family. That fat woman is her mother."

"Oh, rag the mother! I'm for the girl. Do I get to know her?"

"You do," I said.

I didn't see very much of him during the succeeding week after he met the Parkin girl. They formed an instinctive friendship that developed into something else. Just why the girl took to Disney is beyond me. I suppose it was because she was a weak, fragile little slip of loveliness, and he was a very strong and dependable person. The fact that the girl overlooked Disney's faulty grammar and etiquette, and showed him plainly that she liked him and liked to have him around her, changed him a great deal. He began to exhibit a swaggering confidence to the other people, and to ignore the ones he had met.

"This girl," he said to me, "is going to be Mrs. Earl of Orth, all right, all right. Say, Stuart, I know what I'm getting, too. She hasn't got any idea of who or what I am. She just likes me—me, common old Hen Disney, pretty much the same as when he drove a milk wagon."

Reason was useless, and, after all, a man should be allowed to find happiness in his own way.

There is no doubt that the little Parkin girl liked him immensely, and their presence together excited considerable comment about the hotel. Both parties being undesirables, they didn't much matter; but, encouraged by the women, the men began to throw nasty insinuations, and when one night a drive which began after dinner extended until 2 o'clock in the morning, the hotel began to question the respectability of the little Parkin girl.

Up to this time I must say that I had very little regard or respect for Henry Disney, but had stuck to him for the reason that financial betterment showed itself.

"Jaimes swelled up like a pouter pigeon."

I had seated myself on the porch of the hotel and was waiting for Disney to finish his breakfast, when four or five men whom I knew drew up rocking chairs a little ways from me. When I say men, I do so unadvisedly. Two of them might have been over 21. The others were anywhere down to 18.

They began to talk about the night escapade of Disney and Miss Parkin, and it appears that they had been seen in a private dining room of a road tavern near Pikesville. Innuendo was followed by plain statements. Jesse Hull, the youngest of the lot, and therefore the most devilish, capped the climax by winking wisely and saying something which only a foolish, evil-minded boy would say. A moment later Jesse was raised, silently but firmly, and dropped from the porch. The others turned to face Disney.

He had changed a great deal in the sudden anger which possessed him. His eyes shone and his thick lips were compressed in a straight line, like a slit across the face.

"You're a lot of damn' liars," said Disney. "And I'm going to teach you a lesson for what you've just said—each and every one of you. That boy was too small. I wouldn't hit him. The rest of you are my size. Come out into the woods, if you don't want to be punched on the porch."

Remington, the oldest of the lot, took the matter up and looked at Disney with a cold smile. "I don't see any reason for fighting," he said; "I shan't go, for one. If you make any trouble, I'll have the hotel manager put you out of the hotel."

"Oh, you will, eh?" cried Disney. "Well, then, suppose you go and have me put out." And with that he punched Remington's jaw. Remington jumped to his feet and made a dash for Disney, but the latter's fist caught him in the chest and knocked him backward. He tottered, and his foot slipped on the first step leading to the garden. He fell backward and rolled down the steps, hitting his head on the granite and lying very still.

"Now," said Disney, "will the rest of you come to the woods or will you stay here?"

Joe Lessing, who hadn't said a word, stepped forward. "I'll go you, Disney," he said, quietly. "Come on."

But it was too late. Mothers were driving their daughters indoors; men came rushing from other parts of the hotel, and the bellboys collected. Maids thrust their heads from windows and screamed.

"Come on," said Joe Lessing. "Let's get out of this, and have it over."

As he spoke, Jaimes, the hotel manager, made his appearance. He ran to Remington's side and looked up, his face very white. Then he singled out Disney.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

Disney looked at him for a moment, laughed in his face, and turned to Lessing.

"I guess that one will suffice for the lot of you," he said, pointing to Remington. He laughed again and left the scene of action.

They picked Remington up, found he was only stunned, and put him to bed. The story of the fight got about rapidly, and matrons began to take the manager aside and insist on Disney's leaving the hotel and its environs, unless the manager wished them to leave.

"That comes of letting any one in," they said, in epitome. "And this was such a nice place."

Jaimes was nearly distracted. He saw the hotel business falling off, and he came down to our cottage to see Disney. He was servile enough in the presence of what he considered the "blue blood," but he took it upon himself to be insolent to Disney.

"I'm sorry to tell you you'll have to leave the hotel grounds and give up the cottage," he said. "Mr. Stuart may keep the cottage, if he likes—but we can't be too careful here as to who are our guests. We should have made more inquiries."

"Run along and play," commented Disney. "We don't want to stay in your cottage. Your hotel's to the bad, anyhow. Run along, little man."

If Jaimes had been insolent, Disney was insufferably so. "I don't like your looks and I don't like your talk, and I don't want you in this cottage," continued Disney. "And if you stay much longer, I'll give you a life-sized imitation of a little fat man's tailor being introduced to my shoemaker—see? Fly away."

Jaimes swelled up like a pouter pigeon, but declined to aid in the introduction of cloth and leather.

Just as he left, a bellboy from the hotel brought me a telegram. I opened it and read it. Then I gasped and smiled. Immediately afterward I took my way to the hotel.

The telegram was to the effect that the duke of Walshire was dead; that the British ambassador had been notified, and that he was sending his secretary of legation, the Hon. Mortimer Carstairs, to Commoise to invite the present duke to become an inmate of the embassy until he desired to sail for England. The Hon. Mortimer was accompanied by Harry Van Vleck, the arbiter of New York society, who wanted to meet the duke of Walshire.

When I reached the hotel I found that the news had already spread about, and that anxious matrons were preparing their daughters for the dinner which was to come off that night. Jaimes, who had just heard of it, was frantically flying from chef to head waiter, arranging something elaborate. The deluded hotel manager had no idea of the purpose of the visit. He imagined the fame of his hotel was the drawing attraction. The general rumor had it that the Hon. Mortimer, who was an M. F. H. in his own country, wanted to look over the hounds.

In the midst of this excitement a lone figure attracted my eye. It was Mrs. Parkin, and she was weeping fatly in a corner of the hotel porch. I went up to her.

"Oh, Mr. Stuart," she cried, reproachfully, "it was all your fault—introducing that horrid man to my little Alice. And now she is—disgraced——"

I think I mentioned that Mrs. Parkin was impossible. No? Well, she was.

"Ordered from the hotel!" she wept. "Alice, poor child, hasn't left her room since she heard. To think that a child of mine——"

Poor woman! I could see that the golden door to social conquest had, in her estimation, been forever closed to her daughter.

I hung about the hotel, watching the preparations with unholy glee. A bellboy had been dispatched to town to procure an enormous union jack and American flags; and icings were to be made from the mould of a crown. I presently sought out Alice Parkin and had a little talk with her.

She was a pretty child, but her eyes were troubled this morning, and her conversation wandered. While I had no particular love for her, she impelled me to put an arm about her and tell her that I would protect her. Knowing Disney as well as I do, I am glad that I resisted the impulse.

Presently she asked me to take her to him, and I did so. I left them together, and wandered off into the valley, where I lunched with some friends.

I got back in time to meet Carstairs and Van Vleck at the station. A victoria had been sent down for them, and I entered it with them.

"We were just by way of looking you up, Stuart," said Carstairs. "It appears that you are running this bally show, and have the peer tucked up your sleeve somewhere. He's going it incog., eh? Well, where is he?"

I told him that I didn't know. "He's passing under the name of Disney here," I said.

"What a shocking ugly name!" commented Carstairs.

We got to the hotel and found a quiet corner on the porch, and I retailed Disney's story to them. "He's a good sort," said Carstairs. "I like the way he stood up for that girl."

Just about that time Disney came riding around the path accompanied by the girl. She was in a gray riding habit, and looked very demure and pretty and satisfied; and he was in his glory on horseback.

I halloed to him, and he pulled up beneath the porch. The girl did likewise. "Hello, Stuart!" he said. "What's up?" He seemed to have no care on his mind at all.

"These gentlemen have come to extend an invitation to you to come to the British embassy with them," I said. "They know all about you. Do you mind if I use your right name?"

"Not at all," he responded, with a grin. I could see that he understood my reasons. The porch was pretty well packed with hotel guests and folks from the valley. My voice was raised a little, also.

"Then, your grace," I said, loudly, "let me present Captain the Honorable Mortimer Carstairs, of the British embassy, and Mr. Van Vleck, of New York city—the duke of Walshire."

"How d'ye do?" he said, with a nod. Then he turned sharply to me. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that your grandfather died this morning," I replied.

"I see," he meditated. Somehow, looking at him, his face seemed to have grown finer, his intonation gentler, his whole bearing distinctive. He nodded to us again.

"We'll get rid of the horses and come up," he said.

Mrs. Crossley, who knew Harry Van Vleck, arose and walked unsteadily past us. Then, recognizing Van Vleck, with apparently sudden surprise, she extended her hand. Van Vleck, who was a power and very snobbish, did not take the trouble to shake hands. He touched fingers languidly and said, "Good afternoon."

Snobs always bow before greater snobs. Mrs. Crossley told Van Vleck she was glad to see him. Van Vleck yawned and said, "Thanks." Van Vleck found it unprofitable, nowadays, to be even ordinarily civil to any one who was not very rich or very influential.

"Who—was that man—with the girl?" asked Mrs. Crossley, entirely ignoring me.

"That—eh?—oh, yes; that was Walshire," replied Van Vleck.

"Walshire?" interrogated Mrs. Crossley.

"The duke of Walshire," explained Van Vleck, in a wearied tone.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Crossley, agitatedly, and went back to her daughters. A buzz of excitement went up and down, which increased when, a few moments later, Disney came striding up the porch, followed by Alice Parkin.

He stopped before us and smiled curiously. The girl looked appealingly at me.

"What does all this mean, Mr. Stuart?" she asked. "Won't you tell me?"

Carstairs threw away his cigarette, and both he and Van Vleck rose. "Miss Parkin," said I, "let me intro——"

"Wait a moment," said Disney, still with his curious smile. "You've made a mistake, Stuart. Pardon." He turned to the girl. "My dear, allow me." There was nothing coarse about him now. He was infinitely tender.

"Captain Carstairs, Mr. Van Vleck," he said; "this is my wife, the duchess of Walshire."

I stepped back suddenly and sat down. Carstairs took the pink palm extended, and looked into the amazed blue eyes.

"Your grace," he murmured, "it is an honor."

There isn't very much more to tell. I may say that I am still with Walshire, and he and I have become good friends. He took four years at Oxford after coming to England, while his wife lived in the village and became very popular there, which popularity sowed the seeds for the social prominence that came to her later in London.

As for the change in Walshire, I can only say that I give her a good share of the credit, and extend the rest to him. For today he is a man well worth knowing, and a useful member of the upper house.

An incidental fact that may interest folks who know them is that five of the matrons who snubbed Miss Parkin have unsuccessfully tried to get their daughters presented at court during the London season. But for some reason the ambassador found it inadvisable to grant the requests of the ladies from Maryland. Even amiable and generous people remember things that hurt them, and I really believe that is the only mean thing the duchess of Walshire has ever done.